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Training

**Go State**

Written by Lisa Mulcahy  
 Oct 01, 2009



**Two publicly funded schools with great programs for everyone**

A production of Luck and Loss done in the Indonesian Randai style at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Private college theatre programs can be terrific for many reasons. But that's no reason to dismiss state schools—they offer the same important resources (prestige, excellent faculty, and valuable work experience for students) often at a fraction of the cost. Some of the best and most unique training can be had at both well-known state universities, plus those you may never have heard of. Here are two to prove just that point.

**A Discipline of Diversity**

The University of Hawaii at Manoa in Honolulu is lauded for many attributes—affordable tuition in a picturesque campus setting among them. For theatre students, however, U. Hawaii's greatest attraction may just be its highly respected berth as the premier university in the U.S. for Asian theatre study. U. Hawaii's training program concentrates on a highly nuanced study of Kabuki, South-East Asian genre and Chinese operatic performance styles, with a strong additional emphasis on the history and culture of these complex disciplines.

"The Asian theatre training we offer is systematic in the bringing of master teachers to our students," says W. Dennis Carroll, chair of the department of theatre and dance. "It's a rotating program, meaning that the emphasis shifts from Japan to China to southeast Asia, incorporating different training methods from these diverse geographical areas."

Degrees offered include a BA in theatre and MFAs in directing, design, playwrighting, Asian performance and youth theatre, in addition to Ph.D.s in Western Theatre and Asian Theatre.



University of Hawaii also

"Our training has a broad humanistic element," Carroll explains. "As a whole, it reflects the pictures and paradigms of the human experience. The key to our program, in terms of curriculum, is a full semester sequence, incorporating world theatre courses and dramatic theory. Ideally, we like students to take these courses in order. It's pretty unusual, in that we're not always or solely dealing with Western theatre—although our students read key plays in all genres—but mostly, the focus in on Asian theatre elements." U. Hawaii's esteemed theatre faculty has



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teaches Western-style theatre, like this production of *Macbeth*, from 2008.

boasted a long-time affiliation with Asian theatre professor and noted interpreter Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak, in addition to respected teachers including Julie Iezzi, Patricia N.H. Leong and Kirstin A. Pauka.

U. Hawaii's stage facilities are well-known for their aesthetic beauty, as well as their versatility in terms of usage. The Kennedy Theatre, the school's 600-seat mainstage space, was designed by famed architect I.M. Pei and opened in 1963, named in honor of President John F. Kennedy. The Kennedy's dimensions were intended to accommodate both traditional western blocking and set design configurations as well as Asian theatre staging methodology. Additionally, the 150-seat Earle Ernst Lab space offers students the perfect setting for working on smaller scale department and independent productions.

The program's graduates have made strong impressions in working theatre.

"Our students have become playwrights and performers in major cities all over the world, and many teach at noted universities," Carroll reports. "Many of our students produce wonderful shows, both at the university and beyond—a stunning production of Sarah Kane's *4.48 PSYCHOSIS*, which was presented at a Honolulu venue recently, comes to mind as a highlight of what our students have accomplished."



Top to bottom  
- Correy  
Dorris as  
Afaa and  
Joseph  
Moses as  
Cripple in the  
UM  
Department  
of Theatre &  
Drama's  
production of  
Wole  
Soyinka's  
Madmen and  
Specialists

### Art Meets Academics

The University of Michigan's reputation as one of the country's most prestigious and scholarly colleges is well-cemented—and its theatre department is particularly steeped in excellence. With two campuses in Ann Arbor and Flint, Michigan's theatre concentration utilizes class study in performance, production design, playwrighting, directing and more, blending this curriculum with traditional compulsory and elected liberal arts courses. "The mission and philosophy of our department is to nurture our students in an environment of open artistic expression and academic excellence in expectation of professional development," says department chair Gregory Poggi.

The program's successful grads are numerous; alumni include James Earl Jones, Christine Lahti, and the late Gilda Radner. In addition to distinguished faculty members such as Lauren Friesen, Caroline Gillespie and William Irwin, students have been taught by a truly extraordinary group of theatre professionals, including director Mark Lamos and actor Jeff Daniels—Daniels has even offered work opportunities in the past to undergrads, grads and faculty at his professional company, the Purple Rose.

"We strengthen their individual creative growth while celebrating imaginative collaboration," Poggi stresses. Those pursuing BFAs in acting, directing and design, Interarts (Performance Art) with the School of Art & Design, plus bachelor's degrees have the luxury of working in the elaborate Walgreen Drama Center, featuring the 200-seat Arthur Miller Theatre and numerous rehearsal and design studios, plus a well-stocked theatre and drama library (Ann Arbor); and spacious and flexible mainstage and black box spaces with state-of-the-art computerized tech (Flint). "The department offers a distinctive and rigorous educational experience," Poggi states.



Left to Right: Paul  
Koch as Terry,  
Seon Britton as  
Roscoe and Josh  
Berkowitz as  
Cheese in the UM  
Department of  
Theatre &  
Drama's  
production of Seth

Michigan theatre undergrads, grads and alumni are all actively encouraged to train away from school at performance camps, work during their downtime at local regional theatres, and develop work on their own. Needless to say, this spawns many incredible artistic accomplishments. "A recent and significant highlight was a mainstage production of Seth Moore's *Jonesin'*, winner of a 2008 Hopwood Award for undergraduate drama, which premiered in our Arthur Miller Theatre—Miller himself won a Hopwood when he was an undergraduate at Michigan in the 1930s," says Poggi. "With *Jonesin'* it was very gratifying to see an emerging young playwright have his work produced in the theatre named after one of our grads and one of America's greatest playwrights. As one member of the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival put it, 'The full force of this production, with its direction, lighting, sound and performances... really made for an exciting evening!'"

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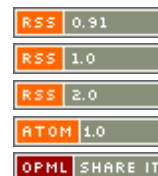
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